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EXAMINER

THOMASSON, MEAGAN J

ART UNIT

PAPER NUMBER

3714

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DELIVERY MODE

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PAPER

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

Office Action Summary

Application No.

09/491,779

Applicant(s)

GAUSELMANN, MICHAEL

Examiner

Meagan Thomasson

Art Unit

3714

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 13 September 2007.
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1-71 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1-71 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☒ The drawing(s) filed on 10 September 2007 is/are: a) ☒ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
- Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
- Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☒ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☒ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
- 1) ☒ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 - 2) ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 - 3) ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- 1) ☒ Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)
- 2) ☐ Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)
- 3) ☐ Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date _____
- 4) ☐ Interview Summary (PTO-413)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____
- 5) ☐ Notice of Informal Patent Application
- 6) ☐ Other: _____

DETAILED ACTION

Response to Amendment

The examiner acknowledges the amendments made to claims 3 and 7-11.

Claim Objections

Claims 26-68 are objected to because of the following informalities: The claims are labeled as "new", when they are in fact "previously presented". Appropriate correction is required.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

The text of those sections of Title 35, U.S. Code not included in this action can be found in a prior Office action.

Claims 1-69,71 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being obvious over Gauselmann (DE 196 24 321 A1), Bridgeman et al. (US 5,033,744) and further in view of Horan (US 4,647,604). For purposes of this action, Examiner will use the patent (USPN 6,089,980) as a translation of DE 196 24 321 A1. All citations will be made with reference to locations in the US Patent.

Regarding claims 1,27,34-46 Gaulseman teaches a method for operating a coin actuated entertainment automat (2a) comprising placing a coin into a coin acceptance device (12) of an entertainment automat; testing the coin in a coin testing device (Col. 6, 10); displaying symbols on a symbol display device (8), wherein a displayed symbol

combination comprises several symbols (Fig. 1 shows several symbols displayed on a display device 8) and wherein upon reaching of a predetermined credit balance in a credit balance counter disposed on the side of the control unit a symbol combination is displayed with the symbol display device (i.e., when a player deposits enough money, he can play the game – this is how slot machines operate). Gauselmann teaches controlling the course of the game with a control unit including a microcomputer (9) and a pseudorandom number generator (216).

Gauselmann does not teach influencing the course of the game by an operational element disposed on the front side of the entertainment automat or substituting a symbol by another randomly determined symbol, and renewing the symbols within a predetermined time window until a winning carrying symbol combination is reached.

However, Bridgeman teaches of a draw poker game wherein a player may substitute a predetermined number of symbols in a given round. In draw poker, the player uses controls on the console to determine which cards to hold. This is influencing the course of the game by an operational element disposed on the front side of the entertainment automat. The gaming machine then dispenses new cards for those not held. This is substituting a symbol by another randomly determined symbol. Further, Bridgeman discloses renewing the symbols until a winning symbol combination is reached (Fig. 4, "Instant Win" step 418). Bridgeman does not specifically disclose allowing an unlimited number of card substitutions within a predetermined time window, and instead allows a player to make a predetermined number of card substitutions in a

given round. However, Bridgeman discloses that "The preferred embodiment of our game is a maximum of five zaps per round and only one zap allowed per card position. Game design allows other embodiments, for instance the maximum number of zaps per round is a game design parameter" (col. 3, lines 1-5), wherein a "zap" constitutes a card substitution. In the cited passage, Bridgeman contemplates adjusting the number of substitutions as a design parameter at the discretion of the inventor, wherein said parameter could include any number of card substitutions in a given round. Further, Gauselmann discloses that in order to win a jackpot prize, the player must obtain a winning combination within a predetermined time window (col. 8, lines 30-40). Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to provide a draw poker type game wherein a player is allowed to make unlimited card substitutions in order to obtain a winning card combination within a predetermined time window, as is taught by the combination of Gauselmann and Bridgeman.

Further, It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to have modified the slot machine of Gauselmann in view of the draw poker features of Bridgeman to influence the course of the game by an operational element disposed on the front side of the entertainment automat and substitute a symbol by another randomly determined symbol (i.e., implement a draw poker game) in order to take advantage of the well known popularity of draw poker. The inventions are analogous in that they are both slot machines in the player entertainment field of endeavor. Additionally, all of the claimed features were known at the time of the

invention and one of ordinary skill in the art could have combined the features with no change in their respective functions, and the combination would have yielded predictable results to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention.

Regarding claims 2,8,19,28,69 Gauselmann teaches networking a second entertainment automat to the first entertainment automat (Fig. 1) and simultaneously switching the played entertainment automats into a uniform game mode upon reaching of a predetermined symbol combination or upon reaching of a predetermined credit balance state of a common credit balance counter (col. 2, 30-37). Gauselmann teaches determining in a game mode the entertainment automat, which has reached the highest winning value within a time window predetermined by the control unit and coordinating the winning value to that entertainment automat, which entertainment automat has reached the highest winning within the time limited game mode. This is the rank sequence determination described at col. 2, lines 39-43.

Regarding claims 3,11,13,15,18, Gauselmann teaches the invention substantially as claimed. Gauselmann teaches a timed game or series of games (col. 2, lines 37-39). Gauselmann fails to teach the details of draw poker – drawing cards, determining if the card are a winning hand, indicating which cards to hold, drawing new cards for discarded cards, etc. As noted above, these details are a conventional part of the draw poker game taught by Walker.

Regarding claims 4,12,36 Gauselmann teaches determining if a special symbol combination or a jackpot winning value has been reached after inserting payment into

the automatic entertainment automat. This is the jackpot trigger value discussed in col. 2, lines 31-37.

Regarding claims 5,21,30,31 Gauselmann teaches networking a second entertainment automat to the first entertainment automat (Fig. 1). Gauselmann teaches determining which one of the entertainment automats assumes a master function and determining which one of the entertainment automats assumes a slave function (col. 7, lines 13-18). Gauselmann teaches determining if a jackpot filling level has reached a predetermined release amount, starting a jackpot game at the entertainment automat performing the slave function, waiting until the slave is ready, activating the game time for the entertainment automats, randomly drawing all cards (i.e. playing one or more games), determining if a game time has ended, collecting the game results of the slave entertainment automat in the master entertainment automat, distributing of the game results to the slave entertainment automat by the master entertainment automat (col. 4, lines 64-col. 5, line 5), calculating of the winning amount, and displaying the winning amount (col. 8-9).

Regarding claim 6, Gauselmann discloses teaching a readiness signal to the master entertainment automat and waiting by the slave entertainment automat for an activation of the game time through the master entertainment automat (col. 7-8).

Regarding claim 7, see claims 1,3 and 4.

Regarding claim 9, see claims 1 and 2.

Regarding claim 10, Gauselmann discloses monitoring a credit balance state with the first operational block exhibiting a game stake, i.e. a credit meter (Fig. 1, 3), monitoring the total playing time (col. 8, lines 30-39), determining winning symbols during the complete game time by a control unit, illustrating and displaying the randomly determined winning symbols with a symbol display device (i.e. how any slot machine functions), and determining a remaining residual game time (col. 8, lines 65-66). As previously discussed, Walker discloses operational elements furnished on the front side of the entertainment automat.

Regarding claims 14,17, Gauselmann teaches initiating a network by actuating the power switch of each entertainment automat (col. 6, lines 66-67), assuming of the master function by one of the entertainment automats, wherein the master function comprises essentially that a coordination of the entertainment automats present in the network is performed with respect to the collection of data through the counter state of the jackpot amount and the release of a common special game, which takes place at all entertainment automats present in the network at the same time, switching the second entertainment automat, present in the network to a slave function, randomly determining a symbol combination in an operational block and displaying the symbol combination in the symbol display device in case of a sufficient credit balance state, transferring an adjustable shared part amount of the game stake of each base game to a common jackpot counter, checking the counter state of the jackpot counter in a branching block following to a determination of the winning value in the base game, sending from the master a control signal to all other entertainment automats present in the network if the

predetermined jackpot counter state is reached or surpassed, wherein the slave switch to the supplemental game based on the control signal after termination of the base game, monitoring in an operational block, if an okay signal was returned by all slaves, starting the supplemental game at the same time in all participating coin actuated entertainment automats (col. 7-9). Col. 7, lines 15-19 disclose slave terminals communicate confirmation signals to the master terminal.

Regarding claim 16, see claims 4 and 5.

Regarding claim 20, Gaulseman and Walker teach the first entertainment automat is furnished with a first additional operating element, wherein the first additional operating element is associated to each presented winning symbol and each presented winning symbol can be held in the following by action of the first operating element, and wherein the first entertainment automat includes a first separate processor and first software; wherein the second entertainment automat is furnished with a second additional operating element, wherein the second additional operating element is associated to each presented winning symbol and each presented winning symbol can be held in the following by action of the second operating element, and wherein the second entertainment automat includes a second separate processor and second software – i.e. each gaming machine is self-contained (Fig. 1, col. 4, lines 59-63).

Regarding claim 22, Gaulseman teaches that the entertainment automat performing the master function accumulates a jackpot amount as an adjustable shared part of the game stake of each base game, and wherein the entertainment automat

performing the master function scans individual game results and subdivides the jackpot winning amount (col. 8, lines 20-30; col. 9, lines 1-47).

Regarding claim 23, Gauselmann teaches a display means furnished as a central large display field (Fig. 1, [3]), wherein the display means displays the temporary jackpot value.

Regarding claim 24, Fig. 1 discloses two linked gaming machines containing the components as listed in col. 3, lines 40-59 and depicted in Fig. 2.

Regarding claim 25, Gauselmann discloses that the first symbol display device displays the temporary jackpot value and the second symbol display device displays the temporary jackpot value (i.e., all game machines display the temporary jackpot value on the display in the lower left hand corner of the top box as shown in Fig. 1). The first and second control units perform an automatic recognition for determining which control unit assumes a master function and which control unit assumes a slave function (col. 6, line 63 – col. 7, line 20). A jackpot pre-release value is set and the jackpot is frozen upon reaching of the jackpot pre-release value (col. 8, lines 6-20). A jackpot payout game is started at the first control unit and at the second control unit (col. 8, lines 30-40).

Regarding claim 26, Gauselmann discloses all automats contain a symbol display device as well as a microprocessor (col. 6).

Regarding claim 29, Gauselmann discloses delivering a percentage of each game stake to a jackpot, determining a reaching or surpassing of a jackpot release value; activating a special jackpot game sequence upon reaching or surpassing of the jackpot release value, which jackpot game sequence is the same at each used

networked entertainment automat; giving to each player of each used networked entertainment automat the possibility to achieve a predetermined result within a predetermined time period, wherein the player has to reach a winning symbol combination predetermined by the entertainment automat after an arbitrary number of games during the predetermined time period (col. 8, lines 6-40).

Regarding claim 33-46, Gauselmann substantially discloses the invention as claimed. In the primary embodiment, Gauselmann discloses the primary game to consist of a reel-type slot machine game (col. 5, lines 40-54). However, Bridgeman discloses the draw poker gaming machine embodiment, as described above, wherein a player's hand of cards is evaluated for pre-determined winning outcomes, including a royal flush. Further, the limitation of claim 34 wherein a game time is activating upon determining that a special symbol combination has been reached, i.e. initiating the draw poker game as a result of a bonus game triggering symbol combination, is not specifically disclosed by Gauselmann/Bridgeman. Instead, Gauselmann discloses activating the time window, i.e. triggering the bonus event, as a result of a progressive jackpot threshold being reached (col. 8, lines 6-19). However, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention as bonus round triggers as notoriously well known to commonly be symbol combinations, as evidenced by Slomiany et al. (US 6,159,098), in col. 4, lines 34-48; and Thomas et al. (US 6,190,255) in col. 9, lines 4-6. Thus, triggering a bonus round by obtaining a predetermined symbol combination does not render the invention new, novel or unobvious to one of ordinary skill in the art.

Regarding claim 47-50, in addition to the invention as described above, Gauselmann discloses a third entertainment automat (Fig. 1) wherein one of the entertainment automats assumes a master function, one of the entertainment automats assumes a first slave function, and one of the entertainment automats assumes a second slave function (col. 7, lines 15-19). All of the entertainment automats contain the hardware disclosed in col. 3, lines 40-58 and Fig. 2. The method of operation of the plurality of networked entertainment apparatuses is identical regardless of the number of machines associated with the network. That is, the draw poker game and progressive bonus game will be played in the same manner among any number of gaming devices that may be connected to the network.

Regarding claims 51,52, in addition to the invention described above, Gauselmann discloses that if the automat performing the master function experiences a failure, a slave will automatically assume the master function (col. 7, lines 25-29).

Regarding claim 54,60 in addition to the invention as described above, Gaulseman discloses furnishing a first control circuit to the first entertainment automat and having a first communications board and a first microcomputer with a first serial interface; furnishing a second control circuit to the second entertainment automat and having a second communications board and a second microcomputer with a second serial interface; wherein the first entertainment automat assumes the master function; controlling a display means of a jackpot and a data exchange and data balancing of the entertainment automat disposed in the communications network by the first communications board; a first connection running from the first communications board

to the first serial interface; a second connection running from the second communications board to the second serial interface (col. 6). Further, the duplication of the serial interfaces and control circuits parts, as recited in claim 60, is merely an obvious duplication of parts as it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill to duplicate the number of interfaces in accordance with the number of networked gaming machines in order to facilitate communication between them. This does not present a new, novel or unobvious feature to one of ordinary skill in the art.

Regarding claims 55,61 Gauselmann discloses an RS-232 serial interface (col. 6, lines 32-33).

Regarding claim 56,62 in addition to the invention as described above, Gauselmann discloses furnishing the first communications board with a first self-contained central processing unit and with a third serial interface disposed on the side of the first central processing unit; furnishing the second communications board with a second self-contained central processing unit and with a fourth serial interface disposed on the side of the second central processing unit; coordinating to the first central processing unit first fixed value memory storage and a first battery buffered operating data storage; coordinating to the second central processing unit a second fixed value memory storage and a second battery buffered operating data storage; furnishing a first connection between the first central processing unit, first memory components and a first serial communications controller with first serial ports by way of a first address decoder and a first I/O decoder and a first bus; furnishing a second connection between the second central processing unit, second memory components and a second serial

communications controller with second serial ports by way of a second address decoder and a second I/O decoder and a second bus; connecting a first serial port of the first communications controller under connection of a first power amplifier to the first display means formed as a first large display field, with which a temporary jackpot stand is displayed; connecting an external micro-computer to an interface of the first communications controller; furnishing an interface adapter connected at a serial interface of the first communications controller, wherein the interface adapter comprises essentially an optical coupler for galvanic separation and a power stage disposed successively to the optical coupler; connecting the network cabling is connected to the power stage (col. 6).

Regarding claims 57,64 in addition to the invention as described above, Gauselmann discloses setting a first and second individual address number through a rotary switch (col. 6, lines 65-67).

Regarding claims 58,59,65-67 Gauselmann discloses switching on the entertainment automats, performing an automatic recognition as to which entertainment automat assumes a master function or a slave function, having the automats wait for a predetermined time period for a recognition signal of the master, if said signal does not appear, sending a master function assumption signal by the first communications board after a second predetermined time period, sending the master function assumption signal from the first entertainment automat with a lowest address number, confirming a receipt of this signal by the second communications board, in col. 6, line 62 – col. 7, line 57).

Regarding claim 63, Gauselmann discloses an external computer, an interface adapter comprising an optical coupler for galvanic separation and a first power stage disposed successively to the optical coupler, and network cabled connected to the power stage (col. 6, lines 52-61).

Regarding claim 68, Gauselmann discloses an external computer performing a configuration as to what percentage of a game stake case is to be delivered to the jackpot through an interface (col. 7, lines 50-55).

Regarding claim 71, in addition to the invention described above, Gauselmann discloses determining which winning value is coordinated to which winning combination, determining the coin actuated entertainment automat, which has reached a highest winning value within the time window predetermined in the supplemental game mode, coordinating the highest winning value to that coin actuating automat, and paying out the common jackpot for each played coin actuated entertainment automat depending on a respective winning value (description of rank and sequence jackpot payout, col. 2, lines 37-52).

Claim 70 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Gauselmann (DE 196 24 321 A1) and Bridgeman et al. (US 5,033,744) as applied above, and further in view of Johnson et al. (US 7,008,324 B1).

Gauselmann/Bridgeman substantially disclose the invention as described above, that is, the combination of Gauselmann/Bridgeman teaches of a draw poker gaming apparatus that is connected to a network, wherein all of the gaming apparatuses on said

network contribute to and are eligible for participation in a progressive bonus upon occurrence of a pre-defined triggering event. Gauselmann/Bridgeman do not specifically disclose determining a winning value depending on the number of times the winning symbol combination was reached during the allotted time window. Instead, Gauselman discloses an embodiment wherein obtaining a bonus payout is the result of a comparison between a predicted game outcome and an actual game outcome (col. 3, lines 25-34), wherein the triggering event comprises obtaining a pre-determined winning combination within a predetermined time period (col. 2, lines 23-59). Johnson discloses that a bonus may be awarded upon a number of predetermined outcomes achieved in a predetermined amount of time (col. 7, lines 28-31). It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to combine the networked draw poker gaming apparatus taught by Gauselmann/Bridgeman with the bonus award scheme of Johnson et al. as the inventions are analogous slot machine gaming devices featuring bonus awards in the player entertainment field of endeavor. Motivation to provide this additional bonus award method can be found in Gauselmann, col. 5, lines 35-36, wherein Gauselmann discloses the networked system exhibiting "different gambling systems", which contemplates various games and award schemes. Further, Gauselmann discloses that "other types of methods for determining jackpot winnings differing from the types described above" are contemplated in col. 10, lines 15-19.

Response to Arguments

Applicant's arguments filed September 13, 2007 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive. Applicant argues various features of the claims are not taught by Gauselmann, including:

Claim 1: "renewing the symbols within a predetermined time window until a winning carrying symbol combination is reached". See Gauselmann col. 8, lines 30-04, which discloses that "the possibility is given to each user of the gambling machine ... to obtain in a so-called qualification time a predetermined result within a predetermined time interval ... i.e. the user has to reach a winning symbol combination predetermined in the gambling machine within an arbitrary number of games during this time period".

Claim 4: "determining if a special symbol combination or a jackpot winning value has been reached" (emphasis added). That is, the features are claimed in the alternative such that the claim requires that one of events be determined. Gauselmann specifically discloses determining that a jackpot winning value has been reached, i.e. the jackpot threshold has been reached, in col. 8, lines 6-20.

In response to applicant's arguments and for the sake of brevity, the examiner will discuss the overarching concepts of the claims including what appears to be the applicant's inventive feature. Gauselmann discloses the elements comprising a networked slot machine gaming system having a progressive jackpot, wherein all gaming machines on the network are linked together via serial interfaces and communications controllers, and a jackpot game is triggered based upon a jackpot threshold value being reached. Once the jackpot game is triggered, players have a limited time window to obtain a jackpot winning outcome. The jackpot prize may be

shared among all jackpot game participants in accordance with the outcomes obtained by the player on a particular gaming machine. Gauselmann does not disclose the feature of a draw poker game wherein a player may make symbol substitutions in order to obtain a winning card hand. However, Bridgeman teaches these features, including that a player may make symbol substitutions up until predetermined criteria are met, in this case a maximum number of substitutions has been made, or upon obtaining an instant win outcome (e.g. a full house). Bridgeman does not expressly disclose allowing a player to make substitutions until a predetermined time has run out, however Gauselmann discloses allowing a player to attempt to win the jackpot prize until a predetermined time has run out. Thus, the combination of Gauselmann and Bridgeman disclose the invention substantially as claimed.

Applicant's arguments with respect to draw poker game features described by Walker (US 6,248,016 B1) have been considered but are moot in view of the new ground(s) of rejection.

Conclusion

The prior art made of record and not relied upon is considered pertinent to applicant's disclosure. Pertinent prior art includes: Slomiany et al. (US 6,159,098), and Thomas et al. (US 6,190,255); used as evidence to show obviousness utilizing special symbol combinations as bonus round triggering events.

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Meagan Thomasson whose telephone number is (571) 272-2080. The examiner can normally be reached on M-F 830-5.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Xuan Thai can be reached on (571) 272-7147. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

Meagan Thomasson
December 14, 2007



XUAN M. THAI
SUPERVISORY PATENT EXAMINER